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**Blighted Property Review Committee**  
**Wednesday, January 10, 2023**  
**Hybrid Meeting**

**BPRC Attendance:** T. McMahon, N. Eyrich, C. Miller, M. Wolfe, and P. Rye – in person

**Staff Attendance:** L. Kelleher and H. Scheuring – in person and M. Fessler and M. McCrystal - virtually

Mr. Rye called the meeting to order at 6:04 pm.

**Review January 17<sup>th</sup> Certification Property Summary Sheets**

The board reviewed the conditions at each property scheduled for the Certification Hearing on Wednesday, January 17<sup>th</sup> and photographs taken over the past few days.

Ms. Scheuring stated that the following properties will need to be removed from the agenda to restart the blighted property process as the titles have transferred since the Determination Hearing:

- 429 A Locust St
- 728 N Front St

When reviewing the qualifying conditions, the board observed that there are some properties where the water service was turned off between 2012 and 2019 but the water delinquency grew by between \$200 and \$600 over the past 6-week period.

Ms. Kelleher noted that the water line item includes water, sewer, trash and recycling, but the increase still seems excessive. She was asked to follow-up with RAWA.

Ms. Wolfe stated that she has been on the board since its inception and she noted the problems with being overly sympathetic and tabling properties when property owners make promises to take corrective action at the hearings, as often no action occurs.

Ms. Schuering agreed and gave some examples of properties that were tabled and the property owner did nothing to address the condition of the properties. She added that there are several properties on this Certification Agenda that were tabled, and conditions have not improved:

- 429 A Locust – tabled in April 2023
- 448 Mulberry – tabled in April 2023
- 527 Maple – tabled in April 2023
- 136 Greenwich – tabled in April 2023

Ms. Wolfe suggested that holding a property owner's feet to the fire by certifying the property is a better approach, as they then need to address the conditions at the property to remove the blighted designation.

### **Next Steps Following Certification**

The board discussed the need to address the 253 properties that have been certified since the board began holding hearings in 2010. Ms. Scheuring noted that approximately 60 have been removed from the list as they no longer meet the criteria. She stated that many of these properties were transferred to a new owner who was unaware that the property had the blighted designation.

Ms. Kelleher noted the need to follow-up to determine the type of documentation that needs to be filed with the Berks Recorder of Deeds to prevent the need to restart the blighted property process after a property is certified. Although there will be a cost to record the certification, that cost will be significantly less than the cost to redo the Determination and Certification Hearings. She volunteered to do that research.

*Note: The Recorder of Deeds responded January 11<sup>th</sup> as follows:*

*So if we can have you title the document Affidavit or Declaration the fee will be \$45.00 for up to 4 pages and one tax parcel number, add \$4.00 per page over 4 and \$10.00 for each additional tax parcel.*

*The idea would be for you to title it something like Declaration of Blighted Property, or something similar.*

*Someone has to sign it on behalf of the City and that signature needs to be notarized. If you already have a form for the Blight Certificate you could make it an exhibit to the Declaration of Blighted property document you create.*

The group discussed the need for the next steps to occur under the direction of the Reading Redevelopment Authority (RRA), as they are the agency that can acquire the property by eminent domain, tax sale, Sheriff Sale, Conservatorship, private sale, or some other acquisition method.

Ms. Kelleher noted that the RRA has taken the eminent domain initiative on approximately 8-10 properties that were certified as blighted.

Mr. McMahon stated that Habitat for Humanity is the only non-profit agency that currently can rehabilitate properties and they have identified 9<sup>th</sup> and Douglass Street as a target area, due to the construction of the Reading School District STEM School. During a discussion on the financial hardships created for Habitat by the need to purchase properties and rehabilitate them, it was suggested that the RRA assist through the acquisition methods available to them;

eminent domain expenses are approximately \$5,000 per property.

There was a discussion on demolition vs. rehabilitation. Mr. Miller noted that although adjoining properties are shored up and stucco-ed, their mid-block adjoining walls are somewhat ill-equipped. He also noted the disruption in the appearance of the streetscape when demolition occurs.

Mr. McMahon suggested that the City Planning Commission assist the RRA with the next steps for blighted properties. Mr. Rye noted that the Planning Commission's role is to make a reuse recommendation after the RRA has identified properties for acquisition.

### **Update on Target Properties**

The following properties were identified as target properties: 122-124 S 8th St., 1035 Muhlenberg St. and 331 N 6<sup>th</sup> St. are rehab candidates and 1132 Green St is an emergency demo candidate.

Ms. Scheuring stated that the due process for the emergency demo at 1132 Green St. is underway.

Ms. Kelleher asked Mr. McChrystal to ask the administration to allow Administrative Search Warrants to determine if a target property is a candidate for rehab or demo. Mr. McChrystal agreed to undertake this task.

Mr. Fessler will follow-up with Ms. Mayfield to have her paralegal research to identify any mortgages, liens, judgements, etc. for the properties that are identified for rehab.

### **2024 Hearing Schedule**

**The board confirmed the following meeting schedule for 2024:**

- **Determination Hearing – Thursday April 4<sup>th</sup> @ 6 pm**
  - Work Session Wednesday, March 28<sup>th</sup> at 6 pm
- **Certification Hearing – Thursday June 6<sup>th</sup> @ 6 pm**
  - Work Session Wednesday May 29<sup>th</sup> @ 6 pm
- **Determination Hearing – Thursday August 1<sup>st</sup> @ 6 pm**
  - Work Session Wednesday July 24<sup>th</sup> @ 6 pm
- **Certification Hearing – Thursday October 3<sup>rd</sup> @ 6 pm**
  - Work Session Wednesday September 25<sup>th</sup> @ 6 pm

The meeting adjourned at 7:31 pm.

*Respectfully submitted by  
Linda A. Kelleher CMC,*

*Secretary*